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UNCLAS ISTANBUL 001879

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ISTANBUL-ERBIL FLIGHTS RECEIVE MFA CLEARANCE

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This message was coordinated with Embassy Ankara.

1. (SBU) Business contacts here indicate that plans are moving forward for direct air links between Istanbul and Erbil in Northern Iraq. Longtime CG Istanbul contact Berna Turkili informed us on October 26 that she had received "political approval" for such flights from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The positive response came following an application by the proposed operator FLY AIR to Turkey's Directorate General for Civil Aviation (DGCA). Turkili indicated that she arranged a meeting between FLY AIR and Saman Barzani, owner of ZAGROS AIR, in Istanbul on October 25, and that they had signed a protocol for beginning flights.

2. (SBU) According to Turkili, there is now a "tight schedule" for informing U.S. authorities in Iraq about the plan, making formal application to the Iraqi Civil Aviation Authority (ICAA) for its approval, and finalizing Turkish approval. Turkili indicated that she will soon travel to Ankara at the request of the Ministries of Interior and External Affairs to move the process forward. She stressed the need for speed, given "some lobbies in Turkey who don't want to open the Istanbul-Erbil flights."

3. (SBU) Separately, DGCA Security Branch Director Erdal Ulgur confirmed to the Embassy in Ankara that DGCA had received an application for the flight from FLY AIR and that it had received a positive opinion from MFA. He said that the application is being processed and the next step is the release of a flight permit to the company. He did not see any obstacles, unless there is "political interference" to the process.

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